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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the work of a teacher whose school-based action research was awarded a Post Graduate Diploma. The paper attempts to show how the excitement of what is learned in a community of teacher researchers is transferred to classroom communities of students. The story is told by the teacher, her deputy principal, a student teacher, and a university teacher educator and researcher. Action research has been encouraged at the Denbigh School, a comprehensive school with about 1,300 students aged 12 to 18, as part of its educational improvement efforts. The teacher in question, who had been a member of the Denbigh Action Research Group since its inception in 1992, wanted to apply the principles of action research to work with 18-year-olds (British sixth form) to make them more reflective in relation to their school lives so that they could be better students. The teacher's experience in facilitating this group led to a keener awareness of the issues that affected their learning, and resulted in changes to her teaching practice. For example, students reported having too few chances to talk with teachers individually about their work. This realization led to the establishment of student tutorials, which students have appeared to value highly. Organizing learning and development for the teacher resulted in organization of learning and development for students that better suited their needs. (Contains 34 references.) (SLD)

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Transferring the Excitement of What is Learned in a Community of Teacher Researchers to Classroom Communities of Pupils

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Transferring the excitement of what is learned in a community of teacher researchers to classroom communities of pupils. Moyra Evans, Pam Lomax & Helen Morgan, Kingston University, UK. [1]

This paper focuses on the work of Helen Morgan, one of the first group of teachers from Denbigh School whose school based action research was awarded a Post Graduate Diploma. The purpose of this focus is to *close the circle*[2] by providing evidence of how the excitement of what is learnt in a community of teacher researchers is transferred to classroom communities of pupils. Part of the story is told by Moyra Evans, the deputy principal, who set up the group of practitioner researchers in the school and helped the teachers to use an action research methodology to improve their classroom or management practice. Part of the story is told by Helen Morgan, a sixth form teacher and her student Helen Croft, through an account of research in the classroom. Part of it is told by Pam Lomax, from the perspective of her work at the University which was responsible for the accreditation of the scheme.

CREATING AND SUSTAINING A COMMUNITY OF TEACHER RESEARCHERS

The Denbigh Action Research Group is a group of teachers at Denbigh school who come together voluntarily, to improve their own practice, under the leadership of Moyra Evans, the deputy principal of the school. The teachers choose their own topics to study. Their topics are often decided upon in an innovative way which has been developed by Moyra Evans within her own research (Evans, 1995;1998). Each teacher is encouraged to write a story about a pressing professional concern, and this is offered to the group for discussion. By the end of the discussion, there is plenty of food for thought, and each teacher can go away to reflect upon the experience. Writing the story enables the teachers to get in touch with their values, motives, thoughts, ideas and understanding concerning the aspects of their work which are of particular concern to them. It is a way of helping the teachers to discover where they are not living out their professional values, and so are uncomfortable with their current practice. The story method enables teachers to gain the confidence to share vulnerable aspects of their practice. Once this confidence is demonstrated they are encouraged to ask each other more probing questions, to share ideas and feelings about their professional experiences, to try out alternative ways of doing things, to use new information gained from reading around their area of interest, to discuss their understandings with the group in their search for better answers and more effective strategies and to help and to be helped by others in their enquiries.

Moyra's own role in relation to setting up an action research group at Denbigh has been influenced by two 'critical incidents' which occurred in the 1992. The first was at the 1992 BERA Conference in Stirling. She had been working with departments in school on a weekly basis to help the teachers improve their classroom practice and examination results. She had hoped to involve people in their own development and to encourage them to be in control of their own learning. The paper she presented at Stirling was about some of this work with a

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[1] Paper presented at AERA, San Diego, 1998.

[2] Moyra has presented a number of papers at AERA that describe her work developing the action research community at Denbigh School. This paper 'closes the circle' by providing evidence of the impact of the research in the classroom.

department, and mainly due to ethical considerations, she had written up her data and thoughts in the form of a story. The discussion during this session was significant to Moyra's realisation that *writing and discussing stories about professional practice* could be a unique method of promoting staff development. It also led her to re-consider the nature of staff development in school. It opened her eyes to the fact that she had offered in-service training to a group of teachers but it had been owned by her rather than by them. She realised that she had presided over a hierarchical learning situation in which she was acting out the role of teacher and the teachers were in the role of the class. These reflections were reinforced in a second critical incident that happened in school soon after when one of the Heads of Department who had participated in weekly INSET sessions mentioned that the sessions seemed to be based on a 'done to' model of in-service training. This was not what she had wanted to happen. She had wanted a more democratic approach to learning, in which all were involved in raising their own questions and searching for solutions, so that they were proactive and excited in developing their learning so that *'through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers'* (Freire, 1971:67)

The action research group was set up shortly after these critical incidents. Moyra was able to put the meetings on the school calendar as part of the school meetings structure, thus providing teachers with formal recognition for their time spent doing research. This was particularly innovative because the teachers were to be engaged in open access, self identified professional development rather than training to resolve needs identified elsewhere. For Moyra, as perpetrator of the idea, this carried considerable risk. It involved a senior member of a hierarchically organised school giving up her control over teachers' learning. Leaders in such schools are seen as knowing the answers to problems, and to be responsible for directing teachers in pursuit of the solutions (Evans, 1997:273-382). This mirrors one of the problems in school-university partnership[3].

The first members of the *Denbigh Action Research Group* taught all manner of subjects: English, Humanities, Science, Mathematics, Modern Languages, and they emanated from all hierarchical levels. The least experienced was in his third year of teaching and the most experienced had been teaching for about 20 years. People came for many reasons: the idea of doing 'research', a good prospect for eventual promotion, the possibility of greater support in their work in a group that might be 'different' from the usual staff development group, or the possibility of an additional qualification. If we look at what they actually said[4], Henry is the clearest, and the most confident. He was attending the group to 'bounce ideas around before I use them in my thesis' (he was registered elsewhere for a Ph.D). Rose thought the action research would help her to complete a masters degree which she had started in London.

[3] We have addressed this issue in Evans, Lomax & Morgan 1998.

[4] These extracts are taken from material reproduced in Evans & Lomax, 1998.

Jemma said that she had not completed the fourth year of her training course many years before, and now, with the need to change from PE teaching to English, she wanted to develop the confidence to try for a further qualification. Sarah didn't have a degree, and felt a bit 'left out' without one. Fiona already had a Masters Degree! Why did she come? Because she wanted to, she said.

The micro-political context of Denbigh at the time was conducive to innovation. Denbigh is a mixed comprehensive school of about 1,300 students, age range 12-18, and has clearly defined management structures and responsibilities. There is a system of calendared meetings, in which senior management teams meet weekly, departmental and year teams meet together every fortnight, and cross curricular working groups meet every half term. These meetings support the School Development Plan, in that their agendas arise out of the objectives towards which the school is working. In terms of 'the market place' the school is seen by parents and their children as highly desirable, encouraging a culture of success which has resulted in annual improvements of examination results, increased numbers of Sixth Form students, and over subscription at 12+ entry.

In 1992, the school was making changes which were intended to improve teaching and learning in order to produce a better educational experience for students, including better examination results. Teachers were used to attending regular weekly meetings which were becoming less administrative and more concerned with inservice training. INSET days were taken seriously, and many of these were planned and executed by teams of teachers working together. There was a will amongst staff to be involved in a culture of learning.

Moyra had been working with different departments in the school to encourage staff development. The critical incident that had occurred in Stirling had strengthened her resolve to try a new form of staff development that was much more teacher led than had been possible in her work within departments. She had shared her ideas with the principal and other interested senior staff. One reason why the ideas found support amongst senior staff was that at the time schools in general were becoming more professional in their management processes. Denbigh already had a staff development policy as the infrastructure on which to build a framework of staff development. Appraisal had been piloted from 1991, and the school's development planning was becoming sharper and more comprehensive. A number of groups had been set up to discuss aspects of the management of the school.

The *Denbigh Action Research Group* formed in September 1992 and by September 1993 most of its members could enrol in a new Post Graduate Diploma in Action Research accredited by Kingston university. The Post Graduate Diploma mirrored the action research approach that underpinned the masters programmes that Pam Lomax had developed at Kingston and like them was `content free'. Teachers could select their own area of study, using experiential learning and working in collaboration with colleagues to develop reflective practice. The main objective was for teachers to improve their teaching or management

practice. Although the course was content free it was structured through the action research process and through the assessment requirements which were congruent with that process. The course was open for any teacher to join; the only prerequisite was an acknowledgement on the part of the student that he or she would make time for the work and the meetings that Moyra had set up for the Denbigh Action Research Group.

In the first cohort there were seven students out of a school staff of approximately 60. The teachers were supported by the school: financially, through an 85% contribution towards the fees; in terms of time through planned meetings on the school calender; and in the Denbigh School Management Plan through being part of the short and long term objectives. The initiative was supported by Kingston University: through discounted fees which were laid out in a memorandum of co-operation; through provision of a university based internal examiner who also acted as a critical friend; and in the accreditation procedures. There was a clear understanding of the supportive partnership between School and University by the people involved in accrediting the scheme: Pam Lomax supported Moyra Evans, Moyra Evans supported the teachers and the teachers' practice changed so that the pupils benefited. There was also a clear agreement that action research was to be the means through which this supportive partnership was to operate. The interlocking roles of Pam and Moyra, as Director of Studies and Ph.D Research Student from 1991-1996, Pam's commitment to developing action research through her support for the action research group at Denbigh and Moyra's support for the Kingston based network of action researchers[5], were crucial aspects to the success of the partnership. Both Pam and Moyra were also committed to the self study of teacher education, through their membership of the new special interest group of the AERA. From 1994 the focus of their collaborative self study became their roles as joint tutors for the new offsite variants of the Kingston Action Research MA that Pam was developing (Lomax & Evans, 1996; Lomax, Evans & Parker, 1997; Lomax, Evans & Parker 1998). By 1996, they were able to integrate this new MA with the work at Denbigh, so that Denbigh teachers could get their school based action research accredited at masters level.

Within the University, the political significance of the new arrangement - and its emphasis on closer collaboration between the traditional providers of teacher education and the schools and colleges who employ teachers - was clear. The Denbigh School Initiative was a flagship in terms of changes that were to be implemented on a national scale. Although the general climate of educational change in 1992/1993 was focussed on initial teacher education (DES Circular 9/92; DES Circular 14/93), requiring a greatly increased involvement of schools in the design, delivery and assessment of courses of initial teacher training[6], there had also been a

[5] The Kingston Hill Action Research Group (KHARG) meet every six weeks and collaborate on conference presentations and publications.

[6] Teacher in-service training provision was not to be greatly affected by external influences until the advent of the Teacher Training Agency in 1994 (Education Act, 1994).

shift in perceptions about what was appropriate continuing education for teachers. The move had been away from the traditional in-service model, which was mainly based on teachers being released from school to attend courses and to a more school-based approach, which was linked to school development planning. The pattern of in-service training where an expert lectured to teachers had already been replaced in the DPSE and MA programmes at Kingston University, by research based models where practitioners engaged in their own professional enquiries (Lomax, 1989:99-113; 1994:1-28). These principles were to underpin the new Post Graduate Diploma in Action Research, with its flexibility of content and responsiveness to teachers' requirements. The radical element was that it was to be almost wholly school located, and whereas existing provision had been tutored by an equal mix of school based and university based tutors, the new PGDip was to be tutored from staff within the school. This was a radical reversal of normal practice on the part of both Denbigh School and Kingston University. As Ann Liebermann pointed out in her *1997 BERA Carfax Lecture*, teachers have learned not to trust other adults and tend to view intrusive staff development as something that takes them away from the kids. Where teachers engage in school reform, there needs to be a magic combination of two sides of a paradox: top down/bottom up; outside/inside; isolation/colleagueship; and technical/capacity building. Such a combination, according to Liebermann, was the yardstick of an educational reform network. We suggest that the Denbigh-Kingston partnership achieved the magic paradox to which Liebermann referred. There were of course tensions to be overcome, but we believe that we achieved a change in the hierarchical relationships which usually typify working arrangements between universities and schools, such as to be in line with the view that:

> *'people are treated equally rather than hierarchically; authority is shared; respect and reciprocity of response equally confirms collaborating partners. Lives are brought to relationships and lives are enhanced in educational relationship. There is no imposition of one life on another. Instead, educational communities of value to university faculty and school teachers and to school teachers and students are created'.* (Connelly and Clandinin, 1994:101).

CREATING A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY OF PUPILS

Helen Morgan has been a member of the Denbigh Action Research Group since it formed in 1992. She says:

> "Much of the work of the action research group had involved investigating and reflecting on our own practice, engaging with the literature on relevant educational issues and having discussions about our own work in relation to the work of others. This learning environment has provided not only academic stimulation but also a great deal of emotional support for teachers in their day to day practice. The support has been a very valuable factor to all members of the group and I have come to see the tremendous need for emotional support for all staff (especially those in the early part of their careers). I believe that my practice has greatly improved as a result of being part

> of this culture and the reflective practices that it encourages from teachers. This action research group has been influential in developing my views on teaching and learning styles and encouraged me to use some of the same methods in teaching my students (Morgan, 1996a).

Helen, a sixth form tutor for five years, became interested in researching sixth form issues while doing the Post Graduate Diploma (1993-4). She continued this focus on sixth form teaching through working with the sixth form tutor team to develop a more effective approach to sixth form teaching as part of her MA (1994-5)[7]. After completing her MA she was inspired to set up an action research group for a small number of sixth form students, thinking that it might be possible to apply the same principles of group support, reflection in action and action research to her eighteen year old students in their role as learners. The aim was to enable students to explore and discuss their thinking about themselves in relation to their school lives so that they could become more successful students, in the same way as Helen and her colleagues had become more successful teachers. The group first met in January 1996. Many of the initial discussions focused on motivation among students and how this was affected by the quality of their learning. Helen was surprised to find that this particular issue had received very little attention from educational writers. The literature on effective schools included work which referred to the way that students' views about their learning can help schools make changes in the quality of teaching (Rudduck et al, 1996; Soo Hoo, 1993). However, much of the literature concerning teaching and learning styles tended to stop at 16. Yet, her experience of being a sixth form teacher and tutor was that the same principles of teaching and learning applied post 16 even though teachers seemed to see sixth form teaching as different and consequently the good practice that had been built up over years of experience in teaching students of 11-16 was lost. It seemed that teachers expected students to be autonomous and independent learners, to have well developed study skills and be inherently interested in their A level studies - yet many students could not do these things without being guided and supported by their teachers. This issue was to become the focus of Helen's Ph.D. which she began in 1996 under the supervision of Moyra and Pam.

The *Denbigh Sixth Form Action Research Group* was set up in January 1996 with a small group of students. Ethical ground rules were established. The meetings were recorded. Helen introduced the method of story writing to help students clarify concerns, the technique pioneered by Evans and used regularly by the teacher group in school. The following material is drawn from a paper presented by Helen and two of her sixth form students, Helen Croft and Elaine Kirby at a one day conference held at Kingston University on July 15h 1997 (Morgan, Croft & Kirby, 1997).

[7] As there was no MA at Denbigh at the time, Helen joined another group of teachers to complete the Kingston MA (1994-5)

THE TOASTER

I didn't think I'd make it you know, well it was a very traumatic experience. There were people milling about - screaming and shouting - Oh! just thinking about it makes my screws shudder.

I was just sitting on the counter top minding my own business when some human picked me up rather roughly and yanked my chord out of the wall socket. At that point I thought I was being stolen but I was to find out later that what was happening was far worse than being stolen.

At the very moment when my electricity was switched off I fell unconscious. I awoke again to sounds of chaos and then an enormous feeling of disorientation surrounded me like a thick mist. Everything was different, apart from being very untidy, I didn't recognise anything except some of my friends like Kenny the food processor and Mickey the microwave. I searched frantically for my best friend Kelly. (She was a kettle you know, or is still a kettle - I don't know if she's still operating because I still haven't found her).

I was pondering on the thought of where I was when I felt an enormous pain in my plug. That human woman and man I had come to know well were trying to put my lovely round pins into square holes in the socket. I tried to be optimistic and believe I would fit into those square holes. Unfortunately the only thing they succeeded in doing was to chip away some of my metal coating around my pins. Everyone knows you can't put something round into something square without an adapter.

It took a while before I was actually bought an adapter. It was a good feeling when the current finally travelled down my chord and brought back the internal heat that had been missing for so long. The current was very different and it took a little getting used to, my fuse would blow quite often and I would break down because the current was different and my manufacturers didn't make me to accept it.

After a while I got used to the current and I started making friends with some of the new equipment in the kitchen.

The woman is very hungry and uses me often to change her bread into toast. She smiles at me when I give her golden, crisp toast but when the current is too strong and the toast is burnt she shouts at me and hits me. Then she pulls my chord out of the adapter and throws me in the cupboard. I don't like it in the cupboard it reminds me too much of when I was moved to this place.

The man doesn't like using me because his bread doesn't fit into my holes. He always gets one of the other toasters off the shelf and uses it instead. While he is using the other toaster he looks at me and tells me that he's so happy with the other toasters and if I was like them then he would use me.

Because I'm plated with strong, beat resistant metal people don't realise that there is an element to me that is very vulnerable and easy to destroy. That is why I need the metal to protect me from damage.

The Toaster was written by Helen Croft, studying Advanced Level courses in Sociology, Psychology and Biology. The story was about her experiences of joining a new school when she was 15 years old and the problems she faced in fitting in.

Helen: "*The story was quite a traumatic episode in my life. I hadn't really spoken about it before and writing the story in a fictional setting enabled me to distance myself from the character and that made it easier to express my feelings*".

The story was presented to the Denbigh Sixth Form Action Research Group on March 18th, 1996. A fascinating discussion took place following the reading of the story. The students easily fell into the mode of talking about the toaster as if it were accredited with feelings and the ability to act for itself. The following extract is a tiny part of the discussion, selected by Helen as being of particular significance to her.

Teacher:	*This toaster sounds very vulnerable.*
Sue:	*Yes, because she says that people don't realise there is an element to her.*
Elsbeth:	*Why do people think that?*
Sue:	*Is it because she puts on a front of being happy?*
Helen:	*She is very upset though about this new place.*
Teacher:	*She seems to be suggesting though that the man and woman liked her, or else they wouldn't have brought her with them. Surely, they could have bought a new toaster?*
Ann:	*She doesn't seem to like them very much - perhaps she is annoyed that they brought her with them. Perhaps she would have been happy staying in her old home.*
Helen:	*Yes, because they have left her best friend behind - Kelly the kettle.*
Teacher:	*Once she has settled in though, and the current is working again, she does make friends.*
Sue:	*She could have made friends sooner if she had made more effort. She seems like she was expecting all the other appliances to make friends with her. She needs to be friendly to them too. . . .*

Helen reflected afterwards that she would have dismissed this opinion about the toaster's inability to make friends if it had not been for the discussion. She referred to the experience of writing and discussing the story as an opportunity for her to *'take a more objective stance and think about the issue more from other people's perspective'.*

Helen: *'That discussion was very important. In 3 months time I'm going to start University and will be leaving home. I will leave all that is familiar to me and be in a very similar situation to that when I first arrived. I can use all the information gained from the discussion to help me settle in and I will also have learned that almost everyone will feel the same as me and I won't be any different from anyone else'.*

Helen said that the story had enabled her to distance herself from her experiences and feelings, and because it was about a toaster and not about her, the other participants of the group could

talk more freely about their interpretations.

Helen: *'Because I wrote the story from a kitchen appliance's point of view it meant that the personal element of the experience was hidden and people could discuss the issue more freely as they knew I would take any criticism less personally. This also allowed more people to take part because the description was more general and not limited to my own circumstances and they could relate to my story in different ways.'*

In a subsequent interview with the students, Helen Morgan established that they had valued their experience in the group, especially the support gained from the other members and the fact that within the group unique relationships developed.

Sue: *'I guess I could say that Action Research helped me in that it provided me with the idea of analysing the work I was doing and a way to compare it to other methods so I could find the way that best suited me. It was also beneficial because it was a source of interest in my work, which helped motivate me to keep at it, even when it was boring. Meeting together in a group helped because it made you feel like you were not the only one having problems. It helped to find that other people used particular ways to motivate themselves: it made it seem less like they were just super-brains.'*

The fact that two of the sixth form students were able to give a clear and articulate presentation of their work at the Kingston University Action Research Conference for teachers and researchers in July 1997, is evidence of their confidence. Helen believes that membership of the action research group had empowered the students to make their work public in this way.

Helen's experience of facilitating the sixth form group led her to a keener awareness of the issues that affected their learning. Using a questionnaire, she began to gather evidence from all sixth form students in the school about what motivated them and what de-motivated them in their studies (Morgan, 1996b)[8]. She was able to identify a number of issues that led her to make changes in her own *A level* teaching. She worked on her relationships with the students, listening carefully to what they had to say about their learning. Some of the changes she made were simple and structural. For example students said that they preferred shorter deadlines for homework so she planned shorter, more regular homework assignments. Because students said their failure to complete homework was due to a lack of understanding rather than a lack of desire, she spent longer briefing them in class beforehand. She began to use regular review sheets to gather students' views of the course and of their understanding of the concepts and

[8] This research was sponsored by the Teacher Training Agency as part of the Teacher Research Grant Scheme, 1996/1997.

theories covered in lessons. This has helped students to negotiate the structure of the course and lesson activities. It has also helped her to target the areas in which students need extra help, and she has set up after school revision sessions for students who had difficulties. She has learned from the students which activities they found most useful and as a result has built into the programme a series of glossary sheets and more diagrammatic representations of theories.

An aspect of her work which has had considerable impact on the school was her finding that students had insufficient opportunity to talk individually to their form tutors and subject teachers about their school lives. This suggestion was taken up in the school and a new system of fortnightly *individual tutorials*! with form tutors was introduced with the purpose of enabling teacher-student talk on subjects, general sixth form issues and higher education or job applications. Helen has been evaluating the effectiveness of this new system. The results of 38 interviews with 17+ and 18+ students suggested that they valued the new system, particularly its regularity and availability at important stages of their school career such as before examinations, especially modular external examinations (Morgan, 1997)[9].

Despite her success in engaging in a more traditional form of research, Helen remains committed to the value of the student action research group, which was her starting point. She has decided to work in a similar way with her Sociology group. She has done this by setting up support groups of students who are researching similar topics to support and offer advice to each other in one lesson every week. She has also built into the lesson structure individual tutorials every three weeks so that all students have a discussion with her about their work. She has also asked students to keep a research diary so that they may analyse the effect of the support groups on their motivation and attainment. These changes have come about as a direct result of research outlined above. It will be interesting to hear the views of the students once they have become used to this way of working.

PUTTING THE RESEARCH IN ITS POLITICAL CONTEXT

We often hear of teachers feeling overwhelmed with work and oppressed by the many demands being made on them now. We want to put on record that there are still teachers who find their work exciting and who have discovered there is great satisfaction to be gained from learning about teaching. Members of the Denbigh Action Research Group have developed close bonds between each other, being concerned for each other's thoughts and feelings; each has felt privileged that others are prepared to share their professional concerns, and are confident that they are going to be able to change and improve as a result of the thinking they do together. The discovery of story as a means of exploring practice has been an experience which has had a profound and remarkable influence on many of them. As Polanyi (1958) said,

[9] This research was sponsored by the Teacher Training Agency as part of the Teacher Research Grant Scheme, 1997/1998.

> *Having made a discovery I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently.*

To see people seeing and hearing differently is the excitement for us of working in a group of teachers to develop our skills, knowledge and understanding. There is real excitement to be found here for both tutor and teachers in learning about teaching; the excitement of constructing knowledge, constantly pushing the boundaries of what we know through the process of reframing (Schon 1983:140), developing supportive networks and empathising with other teachers' experiences in order to support them in their learning. The teachers' excitement is also in seeing their students learn more effectively; it is in connecting their knowledge to the communities they teach in terms of content and relationships; it is in seeing their students being more successful; and it is in learning about themselves so they understand their own values and the forces that drive them to reflect and reconstruct their knowledge.

Belenky et al (1986:221) talk of the connected teacher and the connected class as creating a culture of growth, in which *'it is assumed that evolving thought will be tentative.'* The connected class *'constructs truth through.....bridging private and shared experience';* everyone's perspectives are welcomed and students are treated as independent people - teacher and students enter into a conversation in which they collaborate to *'construct a new interpretation'.* By encouraging their students to express themselves, and thereby share their thoughts and feelings with others in the class, the students are adding *'to themselves as knowers by absorbing in their own fashion their classmates' ideas.'* (Op.cit, p223). In this paper we have presented a glimpse of how teachers can open up these opportunities to their classes, and in so doing connect to the students through their relationships and through the learning opportunities they have offered.

One of the underpinning imperatives of our paper is the need to make the research public. This imperative needs particular emphasis given the politics of knowledge which make it more difficult for the voices of school teachers and their students than for academics and politicians to be heard. The Kingston University Action Research Group, which encourages partnership between teacher educators in the university and teachers in schools, is not representative of more general attitudes within that Academy. Neither is the Denbigh Action Research Group, with its willingness to look outward from its own institutional base, representative of all teachers at that school. We believe that we have shown a courageous commitment to an ideal of scholarship that is based on more democratic knowledge than often finds its place in many institutions of higher education or many schools. Teachers from schools need courage to share their ideas in scholarly forums and to stand firm in their criticism of what they see as inappropriate ways of addressing school knowledge. Teacher educators from academia need courage to engage in research and writing that counts less than other research given present forms of academic appraisal and their consequences. Why do we persevere? We believe, along with Jack Whitehead (1993:67-77) that teachers construct their own living educational theories from their own experience of teaching and in so doing they are contributing to the

body of teacher knowledge that is essential to the making of a better society. Within our action research groups, we have attempted to explore, evaluate and refine this knowledge in order to push the boundaries of our own learning further. We do this because the conditions for learning are right, and it is interesting to see that the conditions for learning as outlined by Jean Rudduck et al (1996) and drawn from pupils' voices over a period of four years, are very similar to those which we have represented through the teachers' and students' words in this paper. We endorse Rudduck's conclusion that six principles make a significant difference to pupils' learning, and suggest that these equally apply to our own learning. The principles are: respect, fairness, autonomy, intellectual challenge, social support, and security (op cit. p174).

Clyde Chitty, in his foreword to Rudduck et al's book says:

In the growing number of lists of factors allegedly facilitating school improvement and school effectiveness, pupils invariably figure as the ultimate beneficiaries; where they appear to have little or no place is among the groups of people helping to devise an analysis of the situation as a basis for future action.

This could also be said of teachers. Teachers' voices are rarely heard amongst the many who proclaim about what needs to change in schools in order to improve them. Is this because they say nothing worth listening to or is it because they are not given a platform from which to talk?

Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1994:24) talk of 'process -product' research and 'qualitative' research, which have dominated research on teaching in the last twenty years. They point to the 1986 edition of the AERA's *Handbook of Research on Teaching* which claims to be *'the definitive guide to what we know about teachers, teaching and the learning process'* but does not contain *'a single research review written by a school-based teacher, nor are published accounts of teachers' work cited.....Missing from the field of research on teaching, then, are the voices of teachers themselves, the questions teachers ask and the interpretive frames that teachers use to understand and improve classroom practices.'* Does this mean that teachers fail to do research or publish research on teaching? Ken Zeichner (1994:66-84) picks up the same criticism as Lytle and Cochran-Smith and adds to it the worry that, although many university courses encourage teachers to construct their own knowledge about teaching, these accounts are usually put on the shelves and largely ignored by academics. How many journal papers cite unpublished theses?

It might appear to teachers that there exists an academic control, through the universities, of knowledge about teaching so that teachers' research is excluded. But there is also little available research about university teachers and their teaching, which raises the issue of whether a similar conspiracy exists. Might it be that the conspiracy is not against teachers but against the type of research in which practitioners seek to explore how they have improved their practice through self reflective processes? Looking at our own experience, we must

conclude that the research funding that Helen has received from the TTA has been for the more traditional, questionnaire and interview based aspects of her research rather than for the powerful work with her student action research group. Perhaps we should concur with Jon Wagner (1997:13) that "traditional forms of educational research reflect asymmetries of power and knowledge that exploit, dis-empower, or mystify practitioner and subject populations".

One of the reasons why school teachers might respond with less than enthusiasm to tracts written by some university professors is that the teachers think these professors are out of touch with the day to day existence in school. They may be able to indulge in fanciful 'visions' of how it could be and might be and is desirous of being, but they write without knowledge of how children are today, and how precious, relentless and demanding time is in school. It seems obvious to us that an important reason for reconsidering researcher-practitioner cooperation is the fact that without active participation by teachers and administrators, educational research cannot generate findings that are useful to improving the schools (Wagner, op.cit). So we question the ideas of people like Michael Barber, Professor of Education at the London University Institute of Education, who now heads the new Standards and Effectiveness Unit in the Department for Education and Employment. In his book, *The Learning Game* (1997), he makes far reaching proposals, admittedly designed to be provocative, for improving the British Educational System. The suggestions relevant to this paper, however, are that teachers need a five year review of progress, which he likens to the Ministry of Transport (MOT) certificate of road worthiness for a car; that during each period of five years in their professional lives teachers will be expected to update their pedagogic skills; that they will need to take a term out of teaching to experience industrial processes; and that they will become part of a *'research based profession'* - which is *'not what exists at present.'* (Barber:219). In the two pages devoted to enthusing about a research based profession within his book about improving teaching which runs to 304 pages altogether, there is plenty of criticism of research and its relevance, but not a mention of the part action research is currently playing in schools such as Denbigh. Michael Barber is proposing a 'done to' model of teacher development through research - the sort of model that was rejected as inappropriate for teachers at Denbigh as far back as 1992. His model is one that fails to give teachers what they need - what Rudduck describes as respect, fairness, autonomy, intellectual challenge, social support, and security (op cit. p174). It fails to give them the power to control and organise their own learning and development, which leads to excitement in teachers' learning and to better learning experiences for children.

We find it mightily disappointing that this key adviser to a Government which wants its three priorities to be 'education, education and education', does not appear to recognise the significance of the construction of knowledge about teaching by teachers, unlike many eminent action researchers listed in the biography (Elliott; Kemmis & Carr; Zeichner; Cochran Smith & Lytle; McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead; Rudduck; Altrichter, Posch & Somekh; and Winter). Not only does Barber apparently not recognise action research as a way of teachers learning, developing and improving, but he values more highly the experience they might gain in

industry over and above one precious term every five years, which, if we leave aside the thorny problem of losing the continuity of children's learning and teachers' leadership and management responsibilities, could - if it's going begging, be treasured by many, many teachers longing to catch up with the learning that they want to do on developing pedagogy and learning new technologies. Teachers are always trying to catch up - on understanding new ideas, on writing new schemes of work, on analysing data, making interpretations and taking action accordingly, on understanding their practice in the classrooms and their children's learning, on learning about management and applying their learning to their own situations, and on learning about new technologies and finding ways of applying them to their classrooms.

Teachers can find real excitement in their learning, and many of them want to transfer this excitement to their own classrooms. If we are looking for ways to improve schools, let us take note of the evidence we have presented in this paper.

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